

Keeping in Touch

News and notes from
the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

January 1992

UFMCC Plans Role in Russia

Political upheaval in the Soviet Union has brought new challenges for UFMCC.

For the first time in UFMCC history, guests from Russia visited the Fellowship offices. They invited UFMCC to provide information and other resources to help them attain justice for Russia's lesbians, gay men, and people with AIDS.

A gay man and a lesbian from Russia met with Rev. Elder Troy Perry Dec. 3 at UFMCC headquarters in Los Angeles, CA, to discuss the current situation in the Soviet Union. They invited Rev. Perry to attend a national AIDS conference in Moscow April 24-26, 1992.

"We came here to visit AIDS centers and speak with political leaders of the gay movement," said Dr. Alex Babkin, 28, of St. Petersburg. He is a medical doctor specializing in gynecology and AIDS. He spoke through an interpreter, Ms. Katerina Polanskaja, 23, a student at State Linguistic University in Moscow.

"These two young people put a face on what's happening in Russia," Rev. Perry said.

Their visit was sponsored by Ms. Robin Tyler, a lesbian feminist activist and comedian based in Los Angeles. "UFMCC can save hundreds of thousands of lives of gay and lesbian Russians," Ms. Tyler said. "I know this is our next calling."

The visitors described desperate food shortages since the coup attempt in August and the subsequent break-up of the Soviet Union. Economic conditions are such that Dr. Babkin's



Plans are made for UFMCC's role in Russia by, from left, Ms. Robin Tyler, Rev. Troy Perry, Dr. Alex Babkin, and Ms. Katerina Polanskaja

plane ticket to the States cost \$350---the equivalent of eight years' salary.

Another problem they face is the ignorance of most Russians about homosexuality and AIDS. Dr. Babkin plans to continue his AIDS work as an openly gay man after returning to Russia in December. They said lesbian and gay rights groups are organizing now in Russia, but "they are all competitive."

Rev. Perry urged UFMCC members and churches to send special contributions to UFMCC headquarters to help finance his trip to Moscow and other assistance to the Russian people. "UFMCC must respond to the tremendous need in Russia today," he said. □



Ms. Polanskaja and Dr. Babkin confer

Bonds Help MCC Churches Buy Buildings

Two UFMCC churches have taken major steps toward purchasing church buildings.

MCC Austin, TX, purchased a new church building in December, and expects to move into it by Easter.

Rev. Wendy Foxworth, pastor, said the church purchased a set of two buildings with 12,000 square feet of space, compared to 1,800 square feet at its present location. The new facilities are located on 2.63 acres of land, and include a sanctuary that seats 250 people.

MCC New York, NY, began its capital campaign toward purchase of a building on the first Sunday in Advent, and raised \$20,000 in the first week, said Rev. Pat Bumgardner, pastor. "Building a miracle on 13th Street" is the theme of the campaign. **Stepping Out In Faith**

Rev. Foxworth explained that MCC Austin decided to "step out in faith" and buy a building by using its standard decision-making process, which avoids the common pitfall of focusing on lack of money.

"When someone brings us an idea, we ask: First, is this a great thing for God? Second, will it meet the needs of a lot of people, not just a special interest group? Third, is someone else in the community already doing it? If they are, we try to support them," she said.

Through a church bond drive, MCC Austin raised \$235,000 in one month to purchase the church. Another \$65,000 is needed for renovations.

"What's amazing about a bond drive is you're asking people to loan money to the church for good interest rates," Rev. Foxworth said. "It allowed people to have a wonderful investment and it allowed the church to move on."

How Church Bonds Work

Church bonds are certificates of indebtedness issued by churches as nonprofit organizations to provide funds for acquisition of property, building expansion or debt retirement.

The church designates a prescribed portion of its income for deposit to a Sinking Fund Account with a Paying Agent for the orderly payment of bonds and interest as they mature.

The Paying Agent is a bank of trust company which serves as depository for the church's Sinking Fund Account and acts on behalf of the church to pay interest and principal on the date due.

In effect, anyone who buys a church bond becomes the lender to the church and the receiver of interest on their "loan." Bonds pay between two and three times the rate of regular savings accounts at present.

Church bonds have less than a 1 percent failure rate in all of U.S. history, making them one of the safest forms of investment in the States.

MCC Austin is one of many MCC churches that worked with

Security Church Finance, Inc. of Orlando, FL. In the past two years, the firm has helped 11 MCCs around the United States purchase their own church homes, and another six MCCs are currently working toward that goal under the direction of that firm. It also handles capital campaigns and bond sale programs for a wide range of denominations throughout the country. Security Church Finance is one of many bond companies of this sort in the United States. □

Samaritan Leaders Attend Theology Conference

Samaritan College was represented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR)/Society of Biblical Literature.

Rev. Sandra Robinson, dean, and Rev. Bob Arthur, professor, both members of AAR, attended the meeting Nov. 22-26 in Kansas City, KS.

Approximately 3,000 theologians from nearly every denomination and faith came together to present and hear the most recent religious scholarship.

Rev. Robinson attended the Reading, Rhetoric and the Hebrew Bible section with the theme Constructing Gender/Constructing Sexuality, the African American Theology and Biblical Hermeneutics Group, and the AAR Group on Lesbian Feminist Issues in Religion. She is invited to present a paper to the lesbian feminist group at the next annual meeting in San Francisco in November 1992.

Rev. Arthur attended the sessions on Egyptology and the History and Culture of Ancient Israel, including Ancient Israel as "Otherworld" and the Land of Exile in Ancient Egyptian Folktales and Narratives, The "Israel Stela" and Its Modern Interpreters, Shechemite Rhetorical Tradition in the Late Bronze Age, and the Location of Sharuhen/Sharhan.

In the opening address, James B. Wiggins, executive director of the AAR, challenged the Academy not to deteriorate into a snobbish, elite group who saw things only from their own narrow academic disciplines with no crossover or wider viewpoints.

"The annual gathering of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature is the place to go to discover where the cutting edges of Biblical scholarship are emerging," said Rev. Robinson. "Human sexuality and its relevance in contemporary religious academia is certainly one of those edges. Even so, too many lesbian/gay theologians remain closeted fearing loss of position and community. Sadly, this fear creates a vacuum in the scholarship of otherwise brilliant work." □



Keeping in Touch is a monthly publication of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. We are a church of the lesbian and gay community, open to all. Our mission is to call people to new life through the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ, confront injustice through Christian social action, and create a community of healing and reconciliation.

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UFMCC and the *Keeping in Touch* staff wish you a blessed, joyous and justice-filled...

1992

Fellowship-wide Meeting Dates

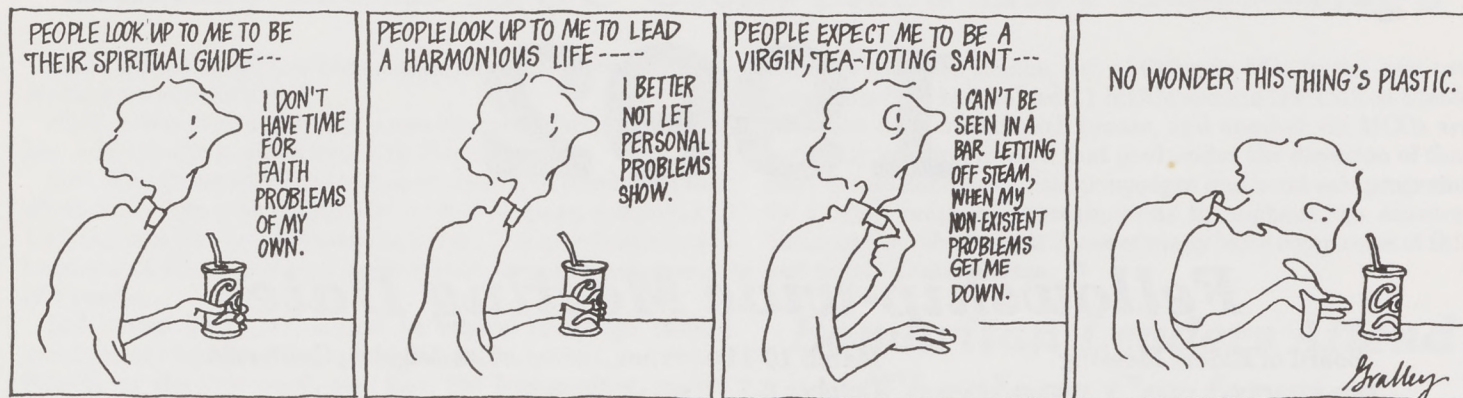
Board of Elders Meeting	March 10-11 October 6-7	Los Angeles, California
General Council Meeting	March 12-17 October 8-13	Los Angeles, California
Leadership Conference	August 25-27	Phoenix, Arizona
People of Color Conference	August 28-30	Phoenix, Arizona

District Conferences

Australian District	February 21-23	Sydney, Australia
Eastern Canadian District	May 15-18	Bolton, Ontario
European North Sea District	November 12-14	Hamburg, Germany
Gulf Lower Atlantic District	April 24-26	Jackson, Mississippi
	November 6-8	Raleigh, N. Carolina
Great Lakes District	May 15-17	Detroit, Michigan
	October 23-25	Chicago, Illinois
Mid-Atlantic District	May 15-16	Rockville, Maryland
Mid-Central District	May 23-26	Billings, Montana
Northeast District	May 1-3	Litchfield, Connecticut
Northwest District	May 15-17	Salem, Oregon
South Central District	April 30 - May 3	Dallas, Texas
Southeast District	November 12-14	Fort Myers, Florida
Southwest District	May 15-17	Las Vegas, Nevada
	November 13-15	N. Hollywood, California
Western Canadian District	May 15-18	Calgary, Alberta

Other Special Dates for UFMCC

World Church Extension Month	February	
Samaritan College Month	May	
Fellowship Sunday	October 4	24th Anniversary of UFMCC's Founding
Day of Commemoration	October 11	Based on General Conference resolution to mark the 500th Anniversary of Columbus' landing



Northeast District Hosts Productive Conference

The Northeast District Conference was "one of our most celebrative and productive district conferences we have ever had," said Rev. Jeff Pulling, district coordinator.

More than 70 people attended the conference, which was held in October in New Haven, CT. Highlights included three excellent workshops, three inspiring worship services, a panel and a caucus by people of color from the district, and a benefit concert that raised \$533 for the district's AIDS Ministry Fund. The business meeting included passing a budget and sharing a 10-year vision for the district.

The next Northeast District Conference promises to be a major success. The conference theme of lesbian and gay spirituality will be addressed by guest speakers UFMCC Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson and Father John McNeill, Catholic priest and author of *Taking a Chance on God*. The conference will be May 1-3 in Litchfield, CT. □

Appointments to be Made

Under a new policy adopted by the Board of Elders, appointed offices with expiring terms are to be announced in *Keeping in Touch*. The Board of Elders will consider appointments to the following offices at its March 1992 meeting. Please forward inquiries and resumes to the Clerk of the Board of Elders in care of the Fellowship Offices by Feb. 15, 1992.

Committee/Board	Office	Term
Board of Pensions	2 Members	6 years
Elders Nominating Comm.	Chairperson	2 years
Fund Overcoming Racism (FOR Fund)	2 Members	4 years
Internat'l Lesbian/Gay Assoc. Conference	UFMCC Rep.	1 year

ETFSS Seeks Input

The Elders Task Force on Structures and Systems (ETFSS) seeks "grassroots" input from all clergy and lay members of UFMCC via the enclosed "Response Booklet" on district issues. The task force requests your help in achieving the widest possible distribution of this survey. Will you make copies available to all members in your congregation/district, etc.? Please complete and MAIL your completed "Response Booklet" by April 1st, 1992. Also, please submit any additional ideas that you would like to have ETFSS consider. □

Worship Idea: Simchat Torah

Cathedral of Hope MCC of Dallas, TX, celebrated the conclusion of the liturgical year in November with a special service modeled after the Jewish festival of Simchat Torah.

At a Simchat Torah service, Jewish people celebrate the fact that they have finished the cycle of scripture readings from the Torah. The people gather and spend the whole night studying the scripture and telling their stories of faith.

Cathedral of Hope MCC began its festivities with a potluck supper. Congregants were asked to bring a dish of food that had a story. "Maybe it was a favorite dish your mother or father fixed. Maybe you remember something funny or meaningful that happened when you were eating this particular dish," the announcement of the service said.

The service continued with Rev. Michael Piazza, pastor, leading a Bible study, followed by decoration of the building for Advent/Christmas, carol singing, and the sharing of stories of the season. □

MCC Bournemouth Opens New Church Centre

On Nov. 24, Rev. Elders Nancy Wilson and Jean White and Rev. Hong Tan attended the opening reception of MCC in Bournemouth, England. Following 12 years of serving the community from a variety of rented and borrowed rooms, the church has now secured the freehold of an ex-Methodist Church in Hannington Road, Pokesdown. The building boasts a sanctuary area, seating around 120 and a large social hall.

Rev. Neil Thomas, pastor, reports that the church has had many struggles throughout its history and the securing of its own Church Centre will help provide stability for the congregation and a sense of permanence for the churches surrounding it.

On Saturday, Feb. 1, 1992 the building will be consecrated in the presence of leaders from nearly a dozen denominations.

Rev. Thomas said, "this is an exciting opportunity for us as a UFMCC congregation to share the good news with our sisters and brothers from the other mainline churches in our town. God will surely bless our time together!"

On Dec. 8, MCC Bournemouth became the first MCC in England with two services. □

Around The Fellowship

Praises

MCC San Luis Obispo, CA, was approved as a New Work at the Southwest District conference in November. The church, which celebrated its first anniversary October 27, is pastored by **Rev. Randy Lester**. Rev. Lester also pastors MCC at the California Men's Colony. He reports that more than 200 people attended the prison ministry's Founder's Day Banquet celebrating UFMCC's founding in October.

Church of the Trinity MCC in Sarasota, FL, celebrated its 10th anniversary in November.

MCC Buffalo, NY, celebrated its 10th anniversary in December.

Rev. Dusty Pruitt, pastor of **MCC Long Beach, CA**, was named Woman of the Year for 1991 by *The Advocate*, a gay and lesbian news magazine. She was honored for suing the U.S. Army and thereby winning rights for lesbians and gay men in the military.

Ms. Jan Skaggs, pastor of **MCC Waco, TX**, was recently elected president of the ecumenical Waco Ministerial Alliance for a one-year term.

On Dec. 1, World AIDS Day, **Rev. Neil Thomas**, pastor of **MCC Bournemouth**, England, was invited to bring intercession to the Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church, Bournemouth in the presence of Roman Catholic Bishop, Crispin Hollis, and a congregation of 250.

Prayers

Rev. Reid Christensen, pastor of **First MCC of Atlanta, GA**, is undergoing chemotherapy.

MCC Hartford, CT, has appointed an interim ministry team following the resignation of **Rev. Patricia Leffler**, who resigned after five years as pastor there.

Rev. Robert Pierce resigned as pastor of **Church of The Trinity MCC** in Sarasota, FL, for health reasons.

Transitions

Rev. Charles Larsen has been elected pastor of **All God's Children MCC** in Minneapolis, MN. He will begin his new duties in early February. Rev. Larsen has been serving as a social worker with the Department of Social Services in San Francisco, CA.

MCC of San Antonio, TX, has appointed **Rev. Roy Lenington** as assistant pastor.

Rev'd. George Allen has been named interim pastoral leader of **Exodus MCC** of Abilene, TX. Rev'd. Allen is in the process of transferring clergy credentials to UFMCC.

Student clergy **Dick Ford** has been appointed as the pastoral leader of **MCC Valley Outreach**, a parish extension church of MCC of Corpus Christi, TX. He will begin his duties in the Harlingen, TX, area on January 1.

Rev. Danny Ray has been hired by **MCC Dallas, TX** as an Artist-in-Residence. Rev. Ray will provide keyboard support for some of the worship services, and will be writing and arranging music to be published.

Positions Available

Church of the Trinity MCC in Sarasota, FL, is searching for a new full-time pastor. Those interested may send a resume to: Mr. Dave Phillips, Pastoral Search Committee, Church of the Trinity MCC, P.O. Box 1546, Holmes Beach, FL 34218.

Buy Bylaws Now

Revised UFMCC Bylaws are available now from UFMCC Church Services. This new edition contains revisions made at General Conference XV in Phoenix, AZ, in July 1991. Each set of bylaws costs \$1.25. Orders may be sent to Church Services at UFMCC headquarters in Los Angeles, CA.

Top 20 Tithes - November 1991

1.	Church/Holy Spirit MCC, Ft Lauderdale, FL	US\$	2,485.21
2.	MCC Washington, Washington, DC		1,830.95
3.	MCC Long Beach, Long Beach, CA		1,822.08
4.	MCC of the Resurrection, Houston, TX		1,697.68
5.	MCC Los Angeles, Culver City, CA		1,518.99
6.	First MCC of Kansas, Wichita, KS		1,464.91
7.	MCC San Francisco, San Francisco, CA		1,440.00
8.	King of Peace MCC, St. Petersburg, FL		1,100.10
9.	St. Luke's MCC, Jacksonville, FL		1,095.48
10.	MCC in the Valley, North Hollywood, CA		1,028.28
11.	Agape' MCC, Ft. Worth, TX		923.56
12.	MCC of the Rockies, Denver, CO		843.41
13.	MCC New Haven, New Haven, CT		768.17
14.	Church of the Trinity MCC, Sarasota, FL		710.90
15.	MCC Key West, Key West, FL		708.04
16.	Church of Our Savior MCC, Boca Raton, FL		700.10
17.	MCC New York, New York, NY		664.63
18.	Christ Chapel MCC, Santa Ana, CA		542.31
19.	MCC of Northern Virginia, Falls Church, VA		522.06
20.	St. Mary's MCC, Greensboro, NC		503.60

(These figures reflect the 10 percent of each local church's income that is sent to Fellowship headquarters)

Top 20 Per Capita - November 1991

1.	MCC Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario	CAN\$	34.21
2.	Open Arms MCC, Rochester, NY	US\$	33.91
3.	MCC of the Disciples, Washington, DC		32.63
4.	MCC of Northern Virginia, Falls Church, VA		28.37
5.	New Life MCC, Berkeley, CA		28.16
6.	MCC Los Angeles, Culver City, CA		28.03
7.	MCC Rockville, Rockville, MD		25.63
8.	Christ the King MCC, Oklahoma City, OK		22.36
9.	Vieux Carre' MCC, New Orleans, LA		20.13
10.	Good Shepherd Parish MCC, Chicago, IL		19.62
11.	MCC Dayton Parish, Dayton, OH		19.00
12.	MCC Long Beach, Long Beach, CA		17.76
13.	First MCC of Kansas, Wichita, KS		17.67
14.	Reconciliation MCC, Grand Rapids, MI		17.50
15.	MCC Hickory, Hickory, NC		17.32
16.	MCC in the Valley, North Hollywood, CA		17.31
17.	MCC Edmonton, Edmonton, Alberta	CAN\$	17.24
18.	MCC Mt. Vernon, Seattle, WA		16.90
19.	MCC Santa Barbara County, Santa Barbara, CA		16.90
20.	MCC of the Spirit, Harrisburg, PA		16.67

It's Time to Right This Bill of Wrongs

The following article refers to the U.S. Bill of Rights, but it describes discrimination faced by lesbians and gay men worldwide. It is reprinted with permission from the author, Mr. Richard Jennings, executive director of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation / Los Angeles. GLAAD/LA retains the copyright.

As America continues its celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Bill of Rights, lesbian and gay Americans want to remind our fellow citizens that many of us live under a Bill of Wrongs. Lesbians and gay men are denied fundamental rights solely on the basis of sexual orientation. In a country founded on equality and freedom, lesbians and gay men are treated as inherently unequal. Gay men and women face legalized discrimination, amounting to a Bill of Wrongs, which in essence says:

I: Lesbians and gay men shall be subject to discrimination in hiring, promotion and other aspects of employment.

II: Lesbians and gay men shall not be permitted to protect their country by serving in the nation's armed forces.

III: Lesbians and gay men shall be subject to discrimination in housing.

IV: Lesbians and gay men shall be denied the right to marry or to have their committed relationships lawfully recognized.

V: Lesbians and gay men shall be denied the right to adopt and

retain custody of their children to the same extent as heterosexuals.

VI: Lesbians and gay men shall not be permitted to protect their committed partners under employee health-insurance plans, and shall be denied tax benefits that are taken for granted by married heterosexual couples.

VII: Lesbians and gay men shall be discriminated against, and their committed relationships shall not be recognized, for purposes of immigration into these United States.

VIII: Artistic expressions by gay and lesbian artists shall be denied the support of governmental institutions.

IX: Lesbians and gay men shall be denied the right of privacy, and shall be subject to discriminatory treatment under state law.

X: Lesbians and gay men shall not be entitled to live freely and openly to the same extent as other citizens, but shall lawfully be subjected to abuse, harassment and threats of violence from anti-gay groups, public officials and private individuals.

All citizens deserve to be treated equally - with respect, dignity and freedom from arbitrary discrimination. Lesbians and gay men deserve the same basic rights - to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness - as other Americans. No one should be made to suffer based on sexual orientation. We call on all who believe in liberty and justice for all to help right this Bill of Wrongs. □

Florida Pastor Speaks Against KKK

A UFMCC pastor was quoted at length in the *Miami Herald* Dec. 10 as an advocate for justice in the face of a recent appearance by the Ku Klux Klan.

Several members of the Klan, a white supremacist group, passed out homophobic brochures in Key West, FL, in early December.

Rev. Steve Torrence, pastor of MCC Key West, was quoted as saying the Klan's visit marked "a sad day for Key West."

"You live here in this island paradise and we're really spared some of the ugliness that happens in big cities. Unfortunately, we were not this last weekend," he said in the *Herald*.

"We're secure in who we are and what this community believes in. We're not going to let one incident unravel that." □

MCCers with Orthodox Background Unite

A group of people in UFMCC who come from an Eastern or Greek Orthodox background is being formed.

The group is being organized by Rev. Peter Trabaris, pastor of Joy of Life MCC in North Chicago, IL. Rev. Trabaris is from the Greek Orthodox tradition.

He plans to establish a network of people from similar backgrounds over the next year and work toward a meeting, perhaps at a conference initially, where they could discuss common experiences and what they have to offer UFMCC. The group might also participate in some worship experiences from their traditions.

Rev. Trabaris invites anyone interested in this group to contact him at Joy of Life MCC, P.O. Box 1161, N Chicago, IL 60064. □

World Church Extension Grows

As 1992 begins, UFMCC World Church Extension (WCE) is reaching more people in more ways.

This ministry is covered in detail by *Global Outreach*, the WCE's quarterly newsletter, which is edited by Rev. Lou Kavar, Field Director of Global Outreach. Highlights of the December 1991 issue include:

Christmas Eve marked the first public worship of MCC in Warsaw, Poland. Zbigniew Czerniak is pastoral leader there.

Rev. Sylvanus Maduka, UFMCC's coordinator of church extension in Nigeria, called for religious bodies to actively participate in health care delivery while he was at the Ministry of Health in Owerri recently. He was visiting the ministry to collect the approval letter for UFMCC to establish a 22-bed hospital in Ezinachi, Okigwe.

UFMCC's ministry in the Dominican Republic expanded to a second church. The new church is in El Tamarindo and is part of MCC Santo Domingo.

The outreach of UFMCC in Montevideo, Uruguay, has grown quickly from a group of three or four dedicated individuals in July to the point where Sunday worship attendance is 20. Ulises Pedraza Cortez is pastoral leader.

MCCA Center was dedicated October 27 by MCC Manila, the Philippines. The center is an apartment that will serve as a place of worship, church office and drop-in center.

To receive *Global Outreach* and support this vital ministry, send donations to World Church Extension at UFMCC headquarters, 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304, Los Angeles, CA 90029 or call (213) 464-5100. □